

## **June 04, 2008 - Ambassador Mark P. Lagon on the Release of 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report**

In every country around the world, including the United States, there is evidence of trafficking in human beings. Men, women, and children are held in domestic servitude, exploited for commercial sex, forcibly recruited as child soldiers, or abused in factories and sweatshops. These forms of human trafficking are, in fact, modern-day slavery.

This year, America commemorates the bicentennial of the outlawing of the transatlantic slave trade. The same lie which underpinned the transatlantic slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely that some people are less than human, is the very lie that fuels human trafficking.

As the head of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, I have seen firsthand the need to actively abolish this trade in people and I have seen the powerful impact when governments, NGOs, and individuals stand up to meet this need.

Consider Nirmala Bonat, an Indonesian maid who has relentlessly pursued justice in Malaysian courts for nearly four years since being brutally beaten and burned on her breast with an iron in 2004 by her Malaysian employer, for which the employer faces criminal charges. Despite having to stay in Kuala Lumpur sheltered by the Indonesian Embassy to continue with court proceedings and being humiliated in court on many occasions, she has stood her ground, refusing to go home and give up her case. In doing so, she has become an inspiration for abused trafficking victims worldwide seeking to claim their rights. She is a TIP hero in our 2008 TIP Report.

Victims of sex and labor trafficking include foreign nationals and U.S. citizens, women and men, and children and adults. As reflected in current U.S. law and international standards, trafficking in persons crimes do not necessarily involve moving people across borders. Trafficking chiefly involves extreme exploitation through force, fraud or coercion, which can be both physical and psychological.

Aye Aye Win is a perfect example. A young Burmese woman who dared to search for work beyond her own tortured country, together with some 800 Burmese migrants, many children, Aye Aye was "placed" in a shrimp farming and processing factory. But it wasn't a job. It was a prison camp.

When she was caught trying to escape, she was dragged back to the camp, refused food or water, had her head shaved, and was beaten. Beaten. Tortured. Starved. Humiliated. Is this not slavery?

Those who commit or facilitate the crime of trafficking in persons—including fraudulent recruiters, exploitative employers, and corrupt government officials—must be held to account. In the last five years, over 100 countries have passed new laws or amended existing law to toughen penalties for human trafficking. Thousands of criminals around the world are now prosecuted when, just five years ago, only a handful wound up in jail.

Those the traffickers grossly exploit and control—including men, women, children, citizens, migrants, and refugees—must be accorded the same respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as is accorded to all persons. Their dignity must be respected and restored. One of the central aims of U.S. foreign policy—promoting democracy and just governance—depends on meeting these imperatives. Our commitment to building capacity and cooperation between nations is evidenced by \$528 million in international programmatic assistance since 2001.

Human trafficking is a crime that steals peoples' freedom and dignity. Today, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will release our 8<sup>th</sup> annual Trafficking in Persons Report to raise the level of awareness and to stimulate action to address this crime. It is an invaluable tool in drawing the world's attention to the existence of modern-day slavery. Millions more people are aware of human trafficking as a result of U.S. efforts to publicize the issue and warn potential victims.

This year's Report highlights the issue of demand, and the role it plays in perpetuating the phenomenon of trafficking. A mirror must be held up to the so-called "customers" of the "sex industry" to realize how the demand for commercial sex can directly or indirectly fuel sex trafficking. With respect to labor trafficking, companies can play an important role in prevention by working to ensure that the products they provide for consumers are not derived wholly or in part from forced labor. Whether sugar cane produced with slave labor in Brazil, shrimp processed with the forced labor of Burmese migrants in Thailand, or apparel made in Jordan by migrant

workers under debt bondage, consumers need to be aware of the tainting of production chains with this modern-day slavery.

As we continue to shed light on emerging global trends for trafficking in persons, we are steadfast in support for countries willing to partner with us in this global fight. Just as the transatlantic slave trade was abolished many years ago, so too can this form of modern-day slavery be abolished today. Let us remain committed to act as a voice for the many voiceless victims of this crime—the prostituted woman or child, the exploited domestic worker, the trapped agricultural laborer. Their bondage demands our attention and action. Let us together restore the human dignity of all those affected by this dehumanizing and horrific crime.

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